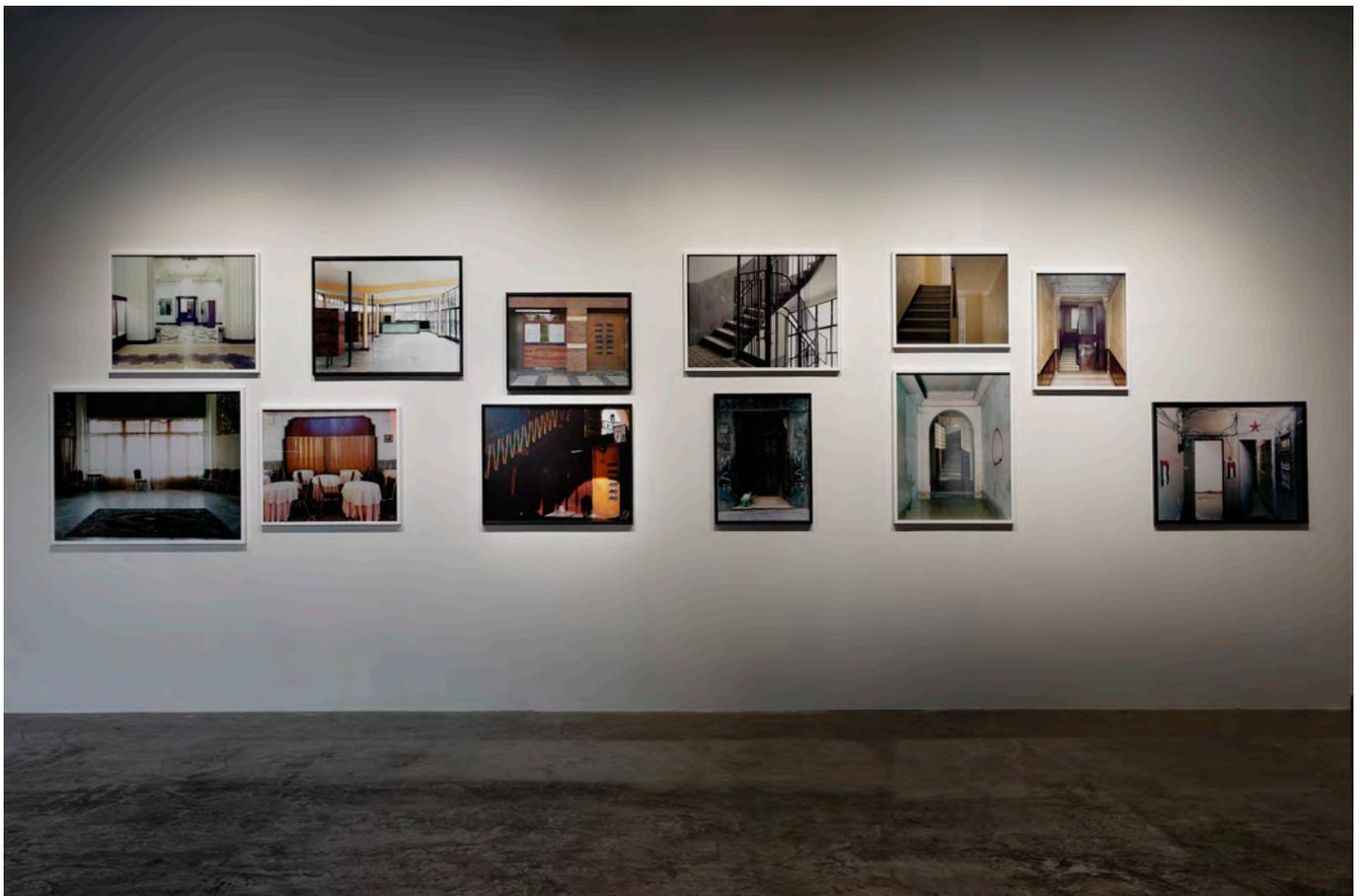


BY RISA PULEO, MODERN PAINTERS
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VISUAL ARTS / FEATURES / ARTICLE

Bouchra Khalili Maps Algiers's "Foreign Offices" at the Palais de Tokyo



Installation view of Bouchra Khalili's "Foreign Office."
(Aurélien Mole. © ADAGP, Paris)

During the 10 years following its own successful revolution in 1962, Algiers became a satellite home to revolutionary

movements from Africa, Asia, and the Americas, and their leaders. The Black Panthers, the African National Congress, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and many other groups established offices there for solidarity, proximity, or asylum. In “Foreign Office,” on view at the Palais de Tokyo through May 17, Bouchra Khalili revisits the former physical spaces of these organizations and also looks back at this moment from the perspective of her generation to understand why this history has been forgotten.

A series of photographs shows these “foreign offices” in their current state. The spaces that once held such revolutionary potentiality have been transformed into banquet halls and vacated interstitial spaces, bearing no traces of their former lives. Just the DFLP continues to operate in Algiers; two Palestinian flags are the only signs of presence in what looks otherwise to be an electrical closet. The cartographic aspects of the artist’s practice take the form of an abstracted map, called *Archipelago* for the ways in which the locations of these offices are clustered across Algiers’s topography like a chain of islands. Organized in similar clusters, the medium-scale photographs offer a fragmented sense of the city’s mundane architecture and public spaces.

How such a past is forgotten is the subject of the third component of the exhibition, a film presented in the same room. With a highly scripted, documentary-style approach,

Khalili films two Algerian youths who piece together this history from generational memory, photographs, and texts written by different movements' leaders. Weaving together French, English, and Arabic, Khalili's inquiry finds its foundation in issues of translation across language and the transmission of information across time. Taking up the task of the historian to reconstruct this fractured history, the artist also presents the subjective struggle of such a task, thinking through disenchantment and revolutionary fervor in the shift from colonial to revolutionary to postcolonial moments. Khalili's attempt to make a lasting document of a history whose emotionality has made it ephemeral and transient is powerful in its synthesized clarity.